OUT OF EDEN

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Adam and Eve and the Problem of Evil

Paul W. Kahn

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is difficult to thank people for teaching me about evil. In this book, however, I argue that evil and love are bound to each other, and that we find evil where we find love. To learn about evil, I have studied the pathology of love. I hope that this has not made me bad company to family and friends. I am fortunate in knowing that no amount of interest in evil could threaten the love that sustains my world. For that, I am most grateful.

Of course, I have also had help with theory and text. My first ideas about evil were formed in a seminar I taught at the Yale Law School in 2000. To the diverse group of students in that class, I owe a special debt. In the summer of 2005, the entire manuscript was critiqued by a powerful group of young scholars in an interdisciplinary seminar on law, politics, and theology sponsored by the National Humanities Center and the Berlin Wissenschaftskolleg. These two seminars represented the beginning and end of the process of writing this book, and I owe much to all who were involved. Several friends and colleagues reviewed the entire manuscript, providing many valuable suggestions. In particular, I thank David Luban, Bruce Ackerman, Benjamin Berger, Tico Taussig, Max Kohn, and Ulrich Haltern. Adam Romero helped to get the manuscript in final shape. As with each of my books, Barbara Mianzo kept the whole process moving smoothly. Finally, I acknowledge the institutional support of the Yale Law School, which has made it possible for me to pursue my ideas wherever they may lead me.

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INTRODUCTION

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THE STUDY OF EVIL

Evil makes us human. We learn this early in *Genesis*, when Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden because they chose to do wrong. *Genesis* tells us that not only ourselves but our world is a consequence of evil: "Cursed be the ground because of you." Finding ourselves fallen, we cannot be at ease: "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return." Nor can we be satisfied with our achievements, for labor is our punishment. If evil brought us to where we are, then the Western religious tradition tells us that our essential task as individuals and communities is to overcome the evil in our nature. We want to return to that "image of God" that we were at creation. We must recover Eden.

Fall and redemption have offered more than a religious frame of reference. These concepts shaped the Western imagination. They offered the frame through which philosophers, theologians, and political leaders, as well ordinary people, understood themselves, their communities, and their relationship to the larger world.[1] Evil and redemption gave meaning to life and death. Without the concept of evil, individuals would not have approached themselves with the same sense of urgency, a sense that their lives are the scene of a great moral battle in which literally everything is at stake.

Today, all this may be changing. Outside of fundamentalist religious groups, there is a reluctance to appeal to the idea of evil. In place of evil, contemporary human sciences examine the social causes of pathology, while postmodernists speak of a need to respect cultural differences. In place of redemption, we are counseled by experts on the need for therapeutic interventions in the lives of individuals and

[1] For example, Susan Nieman recently argued that the history of modern philosophy can best be understood as an inquiry into theodicy—the problem of understanding why an omnipotent God allows evil to inhabit our world. S. Nieman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (2002).

societies. If such remedies fail, there is a turn to law enforcement.[2] But even here there is a fear that the language of evil is more likely to lead to abuse of authority than to efficient and humane policing.

The turn away from the category of evil is a part of the "disenchanted" character of the contemporary world. This has nothing to do with a change in behavior. Man's capacity for atrocious behavior—including hatred, murder, genocide, and torture—continues. Nor have we become blind to the terrible things that individuals and societies do to each other. We continue to distinguish good behavior from bad; we theorize about the nature of justice and injustice. But the distinction between good and bad acts is not the same as that between good and evil. We can identify plenty of injustices in our own political order, but it does not follow that we consider our society evil. Similarly, for the individual, bad choices and bad behavior are not necessarily evil. An evil person is not simply one with a propensity for bad acts; nor is everyone who has committed many bad acts evil. One can be self-destructive without being evil; one can be deficient in one's moral obligations toward others without being evil. Certainly, one can lack civility and yet not be evil.

Of course, evil individuals or societies usually exhibit bad and unjust behavior, but their character as evil is not reducible to these acts or to the propensity to perform them. Something broader and deeper is at stake in the concept of evil—not just a category of behavior, a personality defect, or a political practice but rather a way of being in the world. My aim in this book is first to inquire into what was at stake in the religious conception of evil within the Western tradition, and then to offer a secular interpretation of this conception. I hope to make evil available as a compelling category for contemporary thought. To do so requires an exploration of the genealogy of the concept. While bad or even terrible actions are universal, not every culture has available to it a conception of evil. More is at stake than the form

[2] Karl Rove, President George W. Bush's political adviser, deftly captured this set of attitudes—and turned it to partisan political purposes—in his widely reported comment: "Conservatives saw the savagery of 9/11 . . . and prepared for war; liberals saw the savagery of the 9/11 attack and wanted to prepare indictments and offer therapy and understanding for our attackers." See P. Healy, "Rove Criticizes Liberals on 9/11," *N.Y. Times*, June 23, 2005, at A13.

of explanation of bad actions. The absence of the category signifies not just a difference in the understanding of the relationship of man to the world but also a difference in the relationship itself. Who we are is inevitably a function of who we think we are.

The classical Greeks did not have the concept of evil; for Christians, evil is the central category of human existence. In chapter 1, I explore this difference. In chapter 2, I trace the evolving character of the conception of evil in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the remaining chapters I argue that the conception of evil that emerges from this religious tradition remains critically important to understanding the secular world of family, group, and polity within which we live our lives.

My central argument is that evil does not appear in classical thought because the Greeks lacked a conception of the will. The Judeo-Christian tradition, on the other hand, puts the will at the center of its idea of the human. Where the Greeks saw the problem of man's relationship to the world and to each other as one of meeting—or failing to meet—the demands of reason, once a conception of the will emerges, that relationship is reconceived as one of love. God and men now exist in reciprocal relationships of love. Evil, I argue, is the pathology of the will; it is love gone wrong. Contemporary theory fails to grasp evil, because it measures behavior against the standards of reason, not will. To understand ourselves and the problems we confront, we must stop thinking only of good and bad—or, even worse, of same and different—and recover again an understanding of love and evil. In *Putting Liberalism in Its Place*, I offered an account of politics that put love and sacrifice at its center. Here I am completing the inquiry into the contemporary character of a will that is bound by love and evil. Together these two volumes offer a political theology of modernity.[3]

Confronting the problem of evil, early modern thinkers such as Pierre Bayle, questioned the idea of an omnipotent creator, God. If this world is the product of divine creation, then either God is not omnipotent or He is not good. There is too much evil in the world to reach any other conclusion. Bayle's answer was to turn to Manichae-

[3] The need for a modern political theology was noted by Clifford Geertz some time ago. C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* 121, 143 (1983).

ism—the doctrine that the principles of good and evil are coequal sources of the world—as "the most reasonable response to experience."[4] Manichaeism captures the sense that evil is so basic to our experience that it must itself be a first principle. It is the practical output of a failure of metaphysical dimensions.

Bayle's quandary shows us that evil will not appear if the categories we deploy are one-dimensional—whether that single dimension is the goodness of God or the modern liberal's appeal to reason. For example, evil makes no appearance in science, because scientific explanations aim to give causal accounts of phenomena. That the sun will die and the earth is doomed is not evil if it is simply the consequence of a causal chain that marks the birth and death of stars. Similarly, in the biblical account, as long as creation is the product of God's effort alone, evil makes no appearance. God's judgment that creation is "good" is not a contingent judgment expressing the success of his world-making technique. Rather, being and goodness are one and the same in a world that expresses nothing other than the godhead itself. Evil appears in the biblical account when humans act. To explain that action, we need to appeal to something other than the goodness of creation. We need the faculty of the will.

Will is distinct from reason or desire. In Jewish thought it is the faculty that corresponds to the possibility of the covenant. In Christian thought it is the faculty that corresponds to—and receives—divine grace. In both cases, will's domain is that of faith. For moderns, it is the faculty of the soul that has the capacity for love. After all, we cannot reason ourselves to love, and surely we distinguish love from mere desire.[5] Evil, western religious tradition tells us, is a problem of the will. But we go wrong if we think that the problem is that of a will not shaped by reason. Rather, the pathologies of the will begin with the loss or misdirection of faith.

Faith connects will to a source of ultimate meaning outside the self: covenant, grace, beloved. The problem of evil arises when the will insists that it is the source of its own meaning. Adam and Eve would

[4] Nieman, *Evil in Modern Thought* 21.

[5] On the faculty of will and its relationship to love, see P. Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place* 222–27 (2005).

be "like divine beings": that is, they would be dependent upon nothing outside themselves. In the mythical frame, such a being is one that never dies. The Serpent assures Eve, "You are not going to die." With recognition of dependence comes the imagining of one's own death. Having eaten, Adam and Eve learn that they will indeed die. The locus of evil, I argue, is in the refusal to recognize the possibility of one's own death.

Evil shows itself in different acts—political and individual—but their common source is the flight from recognition of mortality. Refusing to recognize one's own finitude, death is projected on to an other. Thus the paradigm of evil is the murderer who claims the power of life and death: he will live, and the other will die. Denying his own death, the evil actor denies that he is a part of nature or, at least, that part of nature occupied by fallen man. In the language of the Genesis myth, he is "ashamed" of his nature.[6] The victim, the slave, the tortured are all identified with what I call the "shame of nature."

Evil is at the center of Judeo-Christian thought, because will, not reason, is at the center of Judeo-Christian metaphysics. Focusing on the will, however, is not a direction in which our modern liberal culture cares to go.[7] When we do see recourse to an idea of the will, it is in the form of "willfulness," meaning a certain recalcitrance toward the demands of reason. Willfulness is a problem to be met by education: the willful child needs the reasonable guidance of a parent or teacher. A politics of willfulness requires that institutional structures cultivating social habits of moderation be built into the constitutional order. Because modern thought is committed to the idea that reason can structure political order and discern personal moral obligation, it must conceive of the will in a way that makes it fully subordinate to reason. A will cured of willfulness has nothing to say. Or, more accurately, it says only what reason tells it to say. This is the language of the will behind the Rawlsian veil of ignorance: it lacks any particularity, speaking only in the universal idiom of reason.[8]

[6] As I explain, the Adam and Eve myth is actually two distinct myths with two distinct representations of man's nature. One I refer to as the "image of God" and the other as the "shame of nature."

[7] The failure of liberalism to develop an adequate conception of the will is at the center of my critique in *Putting Liberalism in Its Place*.

[8] See J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* 136–42 (1971).

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, knowledge is the problem from which the human condition begins: it was eating of the tree of knowledge that condemned man to a life of labor outside the Garden. Knowledge is not the answer but rather the source of the problem of human existence. The object of reason may be truth, but truth without faith will not redeem man. For the Greeks, on the other hand, knowledge is the goal to be obtained. Even for Plato, who developed a myth of perfect knowledge prior to birth, the mythical idea of recovery grounds a forward-looking process of rational inquiry. In Aristotle's thought, too, that state in which knowledge and being are one and the same is the final cause or end of all existence.

The secularization of modern experience reflects a similar turn to knowledge and reason. The consequence is that our ways of thinking are not adequate to our experience of evil. Economics is the paradigm of contemporary forms of explanation, and there is no evil in economics; there are only differences in tastes. Classical thought and modern liberalism share a common orientation to justice. For both, this is a product of a deep commitment to reason. Both traditions believe that philosophical inquiry is an extension of those everyday discursive practices that should control and structure political and psychological order. This was given visible form in the agora—Socrates' domain. It is expressed as a methodological principle in Rawls's pursuit of a "reflective equilibrium"—testing philosophical principle against practical intuition and vice versa.[9] There is a seamless movement from pedagogy to psychology to politics to philosophy. Evil does not appear in that process. The problem of evil is displaced by the problem of political and social formation, on the one hand, and individual formation, on the other.

For contemporary liberal thought, political and moral failure should be addressed by reform, which is always a matter of identifying and correcting points of irrationality.[10] Those who do wrong are like

[9] *Id*. 48–51.

[10] On reason and reform, see P. Kahn, *The Cultural Study of Law* 8 (1999). Early in American political life, George Washington writes of the fortuity that our history begins in an age in which political science has been fully developed: "The foundation of our Empire was not laid in the gloomy age of Ignorance and Superstition, but at an Epocha when the rights of mankind were better understood and more clearly defined . . . the researches of the human mind, after social happiness, have been carried to a great extent, the Treasures of knowledge . . . may be happily applied in the Establishment of our forms of Government." Circular Letter of Farewell to the Army, June 8, 1783. Similarly, the rise of the administra-

children who do not listen to their teachers or like those who fail to apply moral lessons to themselves. They lack self-control; they allow their desires to get the better of their long-term interests; they are mistaken in their beliefs about right and wrong. Nowhere do we encounter evil as an equal and opposite force in the world. Instead, in the liberal polity we encounter an endless concern with the processes required for reason to rule and with pedagogy. These come together in that modern genre of work that focuses on democratic education, on the one hand, and understands democratic politics as educational, on the other.[11]

Even the most well-known account of evil under the conditions of modernity, Hannah Arendt's report on the Eichmann trial, shares this general outlook.[12] Like her teacher, Heidegger, Arendt lacks the general faith in reason characteristic of liberal political and moral theory. Indeed, her account of the possibility of the evil of the German state relies in part on the rise of a bureaucratic, administrative rationality. That rationality is not evil in itself, but it makes Eichmann possible. Arendt's particular contribution was to identify the "banality of evil" in the character of Eichmann. He could manage the Final Solution, she claimed, because he had stopped thinking. Administrative rationality did not itself require thought. Thinking for Arendt has a special quality of recognizing and engaging the other: less pure reason, more dialogical engagement. Eichmann could not imagine the world from the point of view of another subject. Instead of thinking, he relied on clichés.

Thus Arendt shares the view that psychology, politics, and philosophy all work in the same dimension. But, for her, politics must be modeled on the person-to-person dialogical engagement of Socrates in the agora. Much of my argument is directed against this view. If Eichmann is banal, so, too, is every soldier who expresses himself through the clichés of patriotism. It will hardly do to dismiss the political psychology of the modern state as merely "banal." To understand

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tive agency, in the early twentieth century, reflects the response of political institutions to the rise of scientific expertise in the form of the empirical social sciences. See P. Kahn, *Legitimacy and History: Self-Government in American Constitutional Theory* 126–27 (1992).

[11] See, e.g., J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916); A. Gutman, *Democratic Education* (1987); A. Gutman & D. Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (1997).

[12] H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalam: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1964).

evil, we must stop measuring action against the standards of reason—as justice or as dialogue—and instead turn to the dynamics of will and faith for a subject who is aware that he is finite and will die.

More common than Arendt's view of the banality of evil as the failure of thought is the view that evil is located in the *wrong* thoughts. Evil, then, is a matter of choosing on the basis of the wrong principles—for example, principles of superiority or subordination. A person who believes that she need not extend equal recognition and dignity to others is not a liberal, but is she evil? We cannot cast the entire prehistory of liberalism as evil. Or is it somehow the case that "now we should know better" and so are no longer excused? Should all hierarchies of caste, or of social and political class, be treated in the same way as slavery—a paradigm of evil? Surely we remain attached to some hierarchies: age, education, professional competence, and political or corporate role. Other societies are attached to hierarchies of gender or religion. We have disagreements across all these lines of division, but we do not think that those who believe in positions other than our own are evil. We do not want to label every illiberal society—past or present—as evil. We may want to reform them, to make them more egalitarian, but we do not condemn them as evil.[13]

The modern clash of ideologies might suggest that there is something to this view that the source of evil is the adoption of the wrong principles as the ground of one's actions. Yet there was no necessary reason that the clash of capitalism and socialism should have been seen as a clash of good versus evil. Principles alone will not explain why we would or should invest so much of ourselves in the question of the ownership of the means of production. We carry on a national debate over the extent of government regulation of markets without suggesting that this is anything other than disagreement in good faith. Even if the principle we erect is the interest of every individual in his or her own happiness, we have not yet entered the domain of evil. Those who pursue success in free markets are not evil; nor are those who advance modern social choice theory.

[13] John Rawls confronts this problem of recognizing societies that are neither liberal nor evil, classifying them as "decent hierarchical peoples." J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* 62–67 (1999).

If evil were simply an epithet we use against those who appear different from ourselves, it would not be so problematic a concept. But to explain the perception of evil as a reaction to difference is far too easy. On this view, evil, once again, literally slips away. The Jew, for example, was long a symbol of evil for Europeans, but today we are more likely to locate evil in anti-Semitism than in Semitism. We often look back at the history of our hatreds and think that the problem was in ourselves, not in the objects of our hatred. If we think that the perception of evil is only the consequence of our own emotional pathology, then we will be tempted by explanations that point to moral relativism. We will respond with an appeal to the liberal norm of respecting difference. If only we would all appreciate difference, we think there would be no evil. The conflict between religious principles, for example, need not appear as a clash between good and evil. We can celebrate the diversity of faiths and the multiple ways in which individuals realize the sacred. Religious conflict, like political conflict, is often the locus of the perception of evil, but that does not in itself explain why we perceive evil there or anywhere else.

We cannot be satisfied with such suggestions that evil arises out of misperceptions of difference, because we are inheritors of a culture in which evil is understood to arise from within. That, after all, is the point of the myth of the Fall. Evil is not just something that comes to us from without but is something we find at the core of our own experience of the self. We cannot dismiss this as simply a matter of one's point of view; we cannot accept appeals to difference as the explanation. We feel that evil is deeply a part of our world and yet does not belong there. To locate evil in the misperception of difference is simply to ignore one of the key insights of the myth of the Fall—that the problem of evil is intimately related to, and indeed begins with, the acquisition of knowledge. In particular, it begins with knowledge of the finite character of the self.

The problem of evil is much more than a sense that we might judge ourselves or others to be failures when measured against the norms we articulate. Evil is more than merely a point of view; it is not "cured" by adopting new, more forgiving, norms. Evil is not just a contingent aspect of our circumstances—our lingering youth as a community or as individuals—as if we could eliminate evil were we to try harder.

Yet outside the religious tradition of the Fall, how can we understand something to be both essential and wrong? To understand evil requires that we take up this sense of "not belonging" to our own world.

The disappearance of evil from Enlightenment thought was just as critical a development as the introduction of evil in the post-classical world. For much of contemporary thought, the very term "evil" suggests something archaic and suspiciously religious, something that belongs to the pre-Enlightenment character of man. A disenchanted world, a world transparent to reason, is one in which evil has disappeared, along with Satan, witches, spells, and miracles. Nevertheless, the sense of many people that modern philosophical discourses—particularly liberal theories—miss something essential is related to this failure to engage the problem of evil. Evil is deeper than self-regard, deeper than a weakness of the will, and deeper than error.

The absence of evil from the contemporary worldview rests on a failure to grasp what, borrowing from Hannah Arendt, we can call the human condition.[14] Subjecting evil to the same unidimensional scheme of explanation as everything else misses the phenomenon entirely. It is as if we were to read an economist's account of love. Worse, it is as if the lovers themselves had only the language of economics to describe their own experience. That account might afford reasonably accurate predictions of future behavior, but it would not have touched upon the meaning of the experience to the lovers.

Although we may have lost the capacity to speak of evil, the persistence of evil may be the most pressing problem faced by contemporary Western thought. For the moral and political history of the twentieth century is a history of evil, from the slaughter in the European trenches to the torture chambers of authoritarian regimes to the repeated episodes of genocide.[15] Modern liberalism would meet contemporary expressions of evil with the institutions of legality: human rights law and effective criminal prosecutions. Yet there always appears to be an incongruity between the scope of the problem of evil and this remedial response. One measure of that incongruity may be the one hundred thousand Rwandans accused of genocidal behavior and kept in jail

[14] See H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958).
[15] See J. Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (1999).

for years awaiting a formal judicial process that has barely begun to function.[16] Another would be the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which has had some success applying international criminal law to participants in the former Serbian regime but has left untouched the vast majority of ordinary citizens who supported Slobodan Milosevic and participated in the ethnic cleansing for the sake of a greater Serbia.

There is surely nothing objectionable about punishing the perpetrators of the evils of genocide or ethnic cleansing by applying to them the framework of criminal justice. Punishment and deterrence—the goals of criminal justice—are worthwhile ambitions. Nevertheless there remains an incommensurability, a misunderstanding of the dimensions of the phenomenon, if we are satisfied with the identification of evil as crime.[17] Some evil is not criminal at all, for example, the evil of hatred or jealousy. Some evil overwhelms criminal law, such as genocide. The break between evil and criminality is sometimes noted by speaking of "radical evil."[18] I have no objection to the term, except that today it tends to focus our attention on political manifestations of evil. Its use may keep us from exploring the continuity between the personal and the political in the dimension of evil.

Evil is not an aberration—a failure—in a world otherwise ordered by reason. Rather, it is an effort to make the world anew, to create meaning on a new basis. That new world—the world of evil—is one in which death is projected onto the other. Aristotle wrote that every human action is motivated by a perception of the good. Perhaps we can say, equally, that every human action contains the germ of evil. If we expand our understanding of evil to include hatred, as I do in chapter 3, then none of us is all that far from evil.

[16] The figure of one hundred thousand was widely reported in the fall of 2002. Substantial releases occurred in 2003 and 2005, leaving still about forty thousand genocide suspects in prison. See "Rwanda Starts Prisoner Releases," *BBC News*, July 29, 2005, *available at* http://news.bbc.co.uk/Z/hi/africa/4726969.stm (last visited Sept. 30, 2005).

[17] The turn toward truth commissions, and away from formal adjudication, represents more than a search for institutional efficiency. It responds to a felt need to provide a new foundation for the polity through a more general confrontation with the phenomenon of evil. See M. Minnow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (1998); *Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions* (R. Rotberg & D. Thompson, eds. 2000).

[18] See Arendt, *Eichmann* 241; C. Nino, *Radical Evil on Trial* (1996).

The dispute with evil is a kind of metaphysical war; it is a clash all the way down to the very basis of our understanding of the meaning of our lives and our world. For this reason, today's terrorists, who appear to us as the paradigm of political evil, are often spoken of as "nihilists," as if they wanted nothing positive but only to destroy all that is of value. The terrorist, of course, is unlikely to regard himself as a nihilist. He acts for reasons of his own. We speak of nihilism, however, not merely to excuse our own failures of comprehension but to express something essential to our perception of evil. The identification of evil always includes this effort at negation. Evil persons are accused of worshiping false gods, which means that at the basis of their belief is nothing at all. The oldest accusation of evil is that of idolatry. The idol may promise redemption but leaves us with only meaninglessness and death.

If evil is to be a useful concept, rather than a political epithet, we need a new understanding of the phenomenon. For this purpose, I propose a return to origins, to the myth of Adam and Eve. My purpose in turning to *Genesis* is not to establish the true meaning of the myth as either a matter of biblical exegesis or historical inquiry. Rather, I propose a series of interpretive exercises that draw on historical expressions of the myth but press toward an understanding of contemporary forms of evil. I want to use the myth—or actually myths, since there are two versions offered in *Genesis*—to meditate upon the forms of evil that continue to characterize Western experience. Idolatry, for example, may no longer be the compelling form of evil for us that it was in the Old Testament, but hatred, subordination, and torture continue to shape our understanding and experience of evil. The myth allows access to contemporary forms of evil, because it offers a point for reflection upon the problem of the will for a subject who self-consciously confronts the fact of his own death. More than that, the myth puts evil within a matrix of freedom, knowledge, love, and death. This is just where we must go if we are to see evil clearly. Each chapter that follows takes up anew the Genesis myth, emphasizing different points in order to press the inquiry in new directions as I consider evil within family, society, and polity. The common point of origin in *Genesis* for each chapter's interpretive inquiry emphasizes an underlying unity within the different forms of evil. That unity

should not, however, be pushed too far. Each chapter is meant to stand on its own as well as to illuminate a common core.

One of the first lessons of *Genesis* is that we can speak coherently of evil only where we can speak of subjects who are free. If we reduce action to events that are to be explained by tracing patterns of cause and effect, then we lose sight of evil. Only the free actor brings evil into the world. Just as evil is related to freedom, it is also related to death. In *Genesis*, death is a consequence of the free act. We will have reason to question the order: the free act that is evil may be a consequence of our awareness of death. Were we immortal, we would have nothing upon which to fix the label of evil. Mortality raises the stakes. Immortal, we might be mischievous, but not evil. Indeed, evil disappears from view for those who believe themselves immortal. Curiously, both classical thought and liberal thought understand the subject from a perspective that would push death out of sight. A subject who identifies the truth of the self with reason does not worry about death, for reason is timeless.

Death, like freedom, sets the conditions within which evil is possible. It is not the thing itself. We need to understand what configuration of self, freedom, knowledge, and death is at work in the experience of evil. The argument I pursue is that evil arises out of the way the free subject responds to the awareness of his own death. Evil forms at the intersection of freedom and death. Some of our oldest images of evil represent it as a personification of death. They suggest that evil is an inversion: an acting on the principle of death rather than life. Today the terrorist—particularly the suicide bomber—is assimilated to these images. He is the literal personification of death. He brings death as a shock into our ordinary lives, appearing as if from nowhere. Thus terrorism brings into the heart of our contemporary political debates a deep and difficult philosophical problem.

Separating, as an analytic matter, evil from death is at the heart of the problem of developing an adequate conception of evil. After all, nature may terrorize us with disease, disability, and death. Death terrorizes a free being, because death is a scandal to the thinking subject. Thinking has no natural end. The modern world is also quite familiar with the experience of angst, that sickness unto death. But angst and evil are not the same, although both are related to death. Angst is

passive; evil is active. When death becomes a subject of the free will, we approach the domain of evil. In myth, evil is often represented as the search for immortality gone wrong. We can bring some philosophical clarity to this idea. The problem of evil begins in the flight from death: not the putting off of death, which is characteristic of modernity's culture of entertainment, but a kind of practical metaphysics of overcoming death. The contemporary products of that metaphysics are hatred, murder, slavery, torture, and genocide. These are the subjects of the inquiries that follow.

The locus of evil is not a function of theory or of abstract rationality but of what we actually find in ourselves and in those with whom we interact. For contemporary citizens of the modern Western nation-state, evil is more likely to take familial and political forms than religious forms, because these are the communities that constitute our sense of identity. In truth, we find evil where we find love: in families and in those communities that matter most to us. Both love and evil characterize a free subject who knows he will die. Love would transcend death; evil would conquer death. The modern subject is asked to assume the burden of his or her own contingency. This is an intolerable burden to many—perhaps intolerable to everyone at some point or in some forms. Not every response to this burden is evil, but it may well be that every response has the potential for evil.

If our forms of explanation cannot acknowledge and understand evil, then we will remain opaque to ourselves morally and politically. Here, the philosophical inquiry intersects with practical issues of what to do about the problems of evil that are so pressing in contemporary politics. Philosophy cannot, however, give prescriptions for political or individual action. Philosophers have no particular political expertise, because politics remains an art, a matter of judging the possible within multiple intersecting contexts. This is especially true today, when governments must act simultaneously before domestic and international audiences. Nor can philosophers reach the level of particularity that characterizes the life choices of an individual. Philosophy may help us to understand love and evil, but it cannot tell us whom we should love or whether we should hate.

Philosophers can, however, bring contemporary problems into contact with the larger traditions within which our thinking operates.

They can help to explain why we see our problems and possibilities as we do. Our perceptions of self and world, of meaning and value, are deeply embedded in the history of Western understandings. We do not make the world anew; we inherit it. This is no less true of our conceptual world than our material world. We perceive meaning in certain ways because we perceive the world to be of a certain character. The philosopher's role is to clarify this structure of thought.

The inquiry into evil, as with every philosophical inquiry, is not so much an inquiry into the objects of our judgments as an inquiry into ourselves. What use we make of self-knowledge is a problem beyond philosophy. Philosophy begins and ends with the injunction: "Know thyself." When Socrates took up that task, he did not discover evil embedded in the soul of man. We do. This fundamental change in the character of the human soul is the place to begin.